

VZCZCXRO1609
OO RUEHSL RUEHSR
DE RUEHVL #0594/01 3101603
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 061603Z NOV 09
FM AMEMBASSY VILNIUS
TO RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL IMMEDIATE 0101
RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3866
INFO RUEHXP/ALL NATO POST COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE
RUEHTH/AMEMBASSY ATHENS IMMEDIATE
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO IMMEDIATE 0049
RUEHVB/AMEMBASSY ZAGREB IMMEDIATE 0053
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 VILNIUS 000594

SIPDIS

STATE FOR S/SRAP AMBASSADOR RICHARD HOLBROOKE AND PDAS JONES
STATE FOR EUR/NB, EUR/RPM, SCA/A
KABUL FOR AMBASSADOR EIKENBERRY AND FOR AMBASSADOR WAYNE
DEFENSE FOR AMBASSADOR VERSHBOW

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/06/2019

TAGS: [AF](#) [LH](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [NATO](#) [PREL](#) [EAID](#)

SUBJECT: LITHUANIA IN AFGHANISTAN -- ADVANCING MUTUAL GOALS

Classified By: Ambassador Derse for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Following our mid-October visit to Afghanistan to review Lithuania's ISAF contributions, Foreign Minister Usackas is seeking to inject much-needed new organization, energy and financing into Lithuania's efforts to support development in Ghor Province, where Lithuania leads a 200 member PRT. Lithuania is under severe economic pressure, with a likely 15-20 percent decline in GDP and the 2009 defense budget slashed by 19 percent compared to the previous year. Nevertheless, senior GOL officials underscore that Afghanistan is and will remain their top security priority, despite financial constraints; MOD is now planning, for example, to offer police and garrison Operational Mentor and Liaison Teams (OMLTs). MFA's new effort to exert stronger leadership on development, as well, will make the GOL a more effective partner. Based on my visit to Ghor with the FonMin, I believe the GOL is making an extraordinary effort under severe financial constraints to support an important mission in Afghanistan. Lithuania is grateful for U.S. support provided to date. I would like to ask colleagues in Washington and Kabul to consider the suggestions below to further assist this small but committed ally as it intensifies its development effort in Afghanistan. Such cooperation will pay dividends not only in Ghor, but more broadly, as a concrete illustration of the value we attach to Lithuania's continued commitment and to our partnership in ISAF. END SUMMARY

¶2. (C) Shortly after presenting my credentials to President Grybauskaitė on October 14, I traveled to Afghanistan with FonMin Usackas and a GOL-hosted delegation including senior MFA and defense officials, parliamentarians (including the leader of the opposition), Lithuanian journalists and the Greek Ambassador to Lithuania. Greece is a potential new donor for development projects in Ghor Province. The visit was Usackas' first to Afghanistan. Widely publicized in Lithuania, it was clearly intended to build public and political support for Lithuania's Afghan mission at a time of severe economic crisis here, and specifically to inject new momentum into the GOL's development efforts in Ghor, for which MFA is responsible. During an intense three days, the delegation saluted the Lithuanian Special Forces (SOF) serving in Regional Command South, consulted in Kabul with GIROA officials, representatives of potential donor countries and UNAMA's Kai Eide on development projects and visited Chaghcharan, the capital of Ghor, where the PRT is located.

¶3. (C) Based on conversations in Vilnius since the visit, the trip impressed on Usackas the need for greater coordination and follow up by MFA with respect to the development aspects

of the PRT's mission. The Defense Minister and head of the Special Operations Forces commented separately to me that one of the most valuable outcomes of the trip was Usackas' realization that the mission in Afghanistan "is not just military." Usackas himself recently confided that he now understands that MFA needs a single point of contact, responsible for all aspects of MFA's lead on development, from conception through implementation of projects, to carry out its responsibilities effectively. He plans to appoint a senior MFA official, Chief Counselor Valdemaras Sarapinas, as the lead on Afghanistan. Usackas is also intensifying efforts to reach out to new donors for financial support, securing a Kazakh pledge to support education, likely Greek and Japanese contributions to the provincial hospital, and an Afghan contribution for the airport. Vilnius plans a Regional Command West Conference in Vilnius December 8-9 and a follow on Donors' Conference in Kabul and Ghor in Spring 2010 (exact date is TBD).

¶4. (C) Ghor is the third poorest province in Afghanistan and has severe development needs. While in Chaghcharan, I was struck by the open frustration expressed by local officials at what they see as the minimal attention Ghor receives from the international community and the central government -- despite Ghor's relative stability, a population opposed to the insurgency, and a strong decline in poppy cultivation. As just one example, between 2002 and 2008 USAID invested \$21M in Ghor, compared to investing \$214M in its neighboring province Herat. While there are undoubtedly reasons for the disparity, local officials in Ghor, nonetheless, are openly envious of funding provided to Herat; some ask whether they

VILNIUS 00000594 002 OF 004

have to "start blowing things up" to attract similar international attention.

¶5. (C) Lithuania's intention to do more on development, therefore, is necessary and laudable. The fact remains, however, that as the smallest NATO member to be leading a PRT, and a country very hard hit by the economic crisis, Lithuania lacks deep civilian development/donor expertise and has relatively little development funding available. With the projected decline in Lithuania's GDP by 15-20 percent this year, the development budget, never large, has shrunk to USD 1.2M.

¶6. (C) At the same time, the GOL is making extraordinary sacrifices to maintain its PRT and SOF in Afghanistan. In 2009 Lithuania's defense budget decreased by 19% compared to the previous year due to the economic crisis. The Lithuanian military transitioned to a fully professional force as of July 2009, however the budget is so bleak that it has been forced to temporarily cut the salaries of new privates and sailors to below the poverty level, with new privates receiving only 800 litas (USD 345) per month, 75% below the planned salary of 3400 litas (USD 1465) per month. It is not an exaggeration to say that the GOL is stretching its budget to the limit to fulfill its commitment to help stabilize and develop Ghor. Moreover, despite these pressures, the MOD is seriously looking for ways it can do more for example, by offering a P-OMLT (Police Operational Mentor and Liaison Teams) in 2010 and possibly a garrison OMLT in Afghanistan later.

¶7. (U) In the view of USG colleagues working most closely with Lithuanian colleagues on the ground in Ghor, the GOL is doing an excellent job with severely limited resources and experience, is coordinating with other partners increasingly well, and "we should support them 110 percent." I share their view, after visiting the PRT myself. The GOL, for its part, welcomes USG advice and support.

¶8. (C) Lithuania's success, of course, is also our success and Afghanistan's success. The Embassy team and I plan to make it a priority to take advantage of Usackas' new activism, intensifying our engagement with the GOL in Vilnius

in close coordination with you and other USG colleagues, to support and strengthen the GOL's effort. In addition, we will work closely with the new Dutch Ambassador to Lithuania, who formerly headed the Dutch PRT in Regional Command South and recently offered to share his expertise and cooperate closely with the USG and GOL to support Lithuania's efforts in Ghor. Usackas has welcomed such collaboration.

19. (C) Given the GOL's new focus on development, I would ask that the USG consider the following possible steps to further assist as GOL representatives work with international colleagues and local officials in Ghor to develop a reconstruction plan for the province, and as MFA and MOD search for sponsors to supplement their limited development budget. For example:

-- On December 8-9, 2009, the GOL will host an RC-West Conference in Vilnius and will discuss development needs in Ghor. We will work with the GOL, with the advice of our USG colleagues in Kabul and Ghor, to help focus the conference on the crucial issues and concrete steps to produce results. The GOL seeks a high-level USG representative from Washington. MFA is expecting that NATO will send a representative at the Deputy Assistant Secretary General level. We understand that Washington is now considering a strong USG delegation, possibly led by Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary (S/SRAP) Paul Jones. We greatly appreciate this support and hope this plan will be finalized soon; strong USG representation will spur the engagement of others.

-- In Spring 2010 the GOL will hold a Ghor Donors' Conference in Kabul and in Ghor. We would like to offer strong USG support to help plan and coordinate the event, and ask that Embassy Kabul appoint a POC with whom we can work on this, and on engagement with the GOL on development in Ghor more broadly.

-- The Government of Croatia recently communicated its intention to withdraw its 35 troops from the Ghor PRT in May

VILNIUS 00000594 003 OF 004

2010 in order to consolidate Croatian forces elsewhere in Afghanistan. The GOL is asking for our engagement to either convince the Croatians not to go (they have offered the Croatians a co-lead in the PRT) or to help to identify another partner. We would appreciate Washington's/Embassy Zagreb's support in approaching the Croatians to find a positive way forward, or in identifying and soliciting new partners to fill the gap if the Croatians leave.

-- The GOL is looking for civilian experts to assist with capacity building in Ghor province including prosecutors, doctors, engineers and other subject matter experts. Can we consider providing such experts as specific needs are defined?

-- The GOL is promoting three priority infrastructure projects for Ghor: renovation of the Chaghcharan airfield, construction of the road between Herat and Kabul and building an orphanage/education center in Ghor. Embassy Vilnius will continue to work with the GOL to identify and approach potential donors. USAID recently announced a welcome \$6M challenge grant to fund three airport renovations (including Chaghcharan) and we understand that the GIRA will provide the matching funds to launch the project. Can we work with a designated POC at Embassy Kabul to find a way to liaise more regularly with the GOL and GIRA to ensure sound design and early funding for these key projects?

-- The GOL is promoting several humanitarian projects in Ghor, including construction of a new hospital, a top priority for the local administration and population. Can we explore ways we can support this effort?

-- Agriculture development assistance is urgently needed. Local farmers have moved away from poppy production and it is

critical to provide support for licit agricultural production as a disincentive to return to poppy production. We understand a USDA expert will soon join the Ghor PRT. Can the USG also provide technical support for livestock management, including an inoculation program, and to establish a veterinary clinic and capacity for mobile clinics to service the district?

-- Local officials need assistance to develop a market plan for local products and resources such as mineral deposits, hand-woven carpets, wood carvings and metal works. Local entrepreneurs need access to micro-loans to develop business opportunities. Can we propose a plan to work with the GOL to support such strategic planning for the economy?

-- The Deputy Governor of Ghor underscored the critical need for energy infrastructure, which would have a significant payoff for standards of hygiene and living as well as economic activity. Chaghcharan has only four hours of electricity per day. With three rivers in the province, inexpensive micro dams could expand Ghor's very limited energy infrastructure to provide electricity to schools, homes and shops.

-- Young people in Ghor have limited prospects for the future. 65% of Ghor residents are unemployed and 78% are illiterate. Many young people travel to bordering provinces to look for work and are vulnerable to recruitment by the insurgency. Can we offer new support for programs to engage local youth and offer opportunities for education and employment?

COMMENT:

110. (C) I know that efforts have been made in the past to help the Lithuanians succeed on development in Ghor, and that there have been frustrations with GOL follow up. I want to offer my assistance and that of my team to do everything possible to guide and troubleshoot with the GOL in Vilnius to produce results. We are optimistic that with the GOL's new focus on development, we can make progress. We look forward to working with an appropriate POC at Embassy Kabul and in Washington soon to focus on closer coordination with the GOL.

Such cooperation will pay dividends not only for our mission in Afghanistan, but also in terms of providing concrete reassurance that we value Lithuania's partnership and continued commitment and contribution in Afghanistan under very tough domestic circumstances.

VILNIUS 00000594 004 OF 004

DERSE